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december 2021

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Get into the Christmas Spirit!



Welcome to the December edition...

Christmas is just around the corner, so let's celebrate! Take the kids to see **Santa at the White Swan**, or on his sleigh tour around Wythall and Hollywood, or have a laugh at the local **pantomime at the Core Theatre**. Or if you're in the mood for a festive feast then head to Sollihull between 14 and 23 December. Details of all these events can be found on page 6.

Christmas is a time when we can forget about our to do list and focus on family and the community. But after Christmas if you want to get your home in order, remember all the local tradespeople and businesses in this magazine who are here to help.

Have a very merry Christmas.

Zoe Reece
Tel: 07557 220585
Email: zoe@dorridgedirectory.com
www.wythalldirectory.com



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community events

Solihull's Festive Feast

Solihull Town Centre
14-23 December

Continental Street Market traders will be joining forces with local and regional producers as part of the Festive Feast event. Thursday 16th will be a late-night shopping event with music and roaming entertainment. On Saturday 18th enjoy T-Rex-Mas, a spot of shopping mixed with dinosaurs.

Cinderella Pantomime

The Core Theatre, Solihull
10 December - 3 January

Featuring sparkling sets, fabulous frocks, side splitting slapstick and not one, but TWO outrageous dames, this is an unmissable treat for the whole family. The cast and creatives of Cinderella are raring to get going and cannot wait to put a smile on the faces of Solihull audiences this pantomime season! The clock is ticking so grab your



tickets to the ball now! Call the Box Office on 0121 704 6962.

Santa's Sleigh Visits in Wythall and Hollywood

11, 12, 17, 18, 19 December
Santa's on his way! If you want to see him on his sleigh, he'll be in Wythall and Hollywood at the following times: 11 December 6-8.30pm, 12 December 4-7.30pm, and 17-19 December 6-8.30pm. Track him on www.followmee.com with user name wythallsantasleigh and password wcawpcb47

Kid's Christmas Event

White Swan
18 December 1-3pm

Pop into the pub to get your tickets before they sell out! You won't want your kids to miss out on story time, elf hunts, meeting Santa, decorating Christmas decorations, and taking away a present bag and balloon.

Only £5 per child.

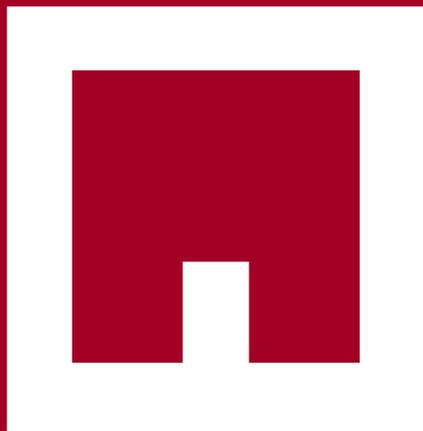
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What to buy a Vegan!

Look around your house. Would you be able to invite people in without a second thought? Or would unexpected festive visitors send you into a panic? It's easy to feel overwhelmed by clutter but follow these simple 'no extra mess steps and you'll soon be ready to open the front door with a smile. Grab a bin bag. Go quickly through the house from room to room and put in anything that is obviously just rubbish: empty packets, wrappers, junk mail etc. Once you've done it, go through again and see whether you've missed anything. The chances are that going through the first time has opened your eyes to other things which can just be thrown away. Now do any washing-up or load the dishwasher. Clearing the kitchen surfaces makes a huge difference.

Grab another bag. Go through the house again and this time look for items of clothing that need to be washed. Pop them in the bag

How do you know whether someone is a vegan?

and take them to the washing baskets. Take a couple of empty and go through yet again, this time looking for items that are easy charity shop donations - things you won't need or use again so don't want to waste time finding a home for, but which are too good to throw away. These might be old toys and games, CDs, DVDs, books, extra pots and pans etc. By now things will be looking much tidier. At this point grab another box and go through one last time and look for things that are obviously out of place but which you know have a home. Put them in the box and rehome them as you go round the house. Then do the washing and drying, and fold and put away the items

Hopefully by now you should feel more in control of your surroundings and will be able to see a way forward. Obviously if your clutter is such a big problem that you are still overwhelmed speak to your doctor about seeking professional help.

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Simple winter tasks

This year's festive season (at least at time of writing), is shaping up to be a little more 'normal', whatever that term now means. While most of us are looking forward to more socialising and togetherness, I'm betting a fair few might think back fondly to last year's smaller, quieter Christmas. And this is where the garden comes into its own. There are always things to do out there, even in December. A few simple gardening tasks offer some pockets of calm and relief amid the busyness of the festive season. They are also a wonderful way to get some fresh air and exercise to burn off those Christmas calories and winter gloominess!

First, take a look at your winter containers. If you have a particularly wet spell, make sure they don't get flooded. If it's dry, then plants will still need water regularly, just give the compost a chance to dry out each time. Pick off any leaves that look yellowed or diseased.

Do you like garlic? I love it. Now is the perfect time to start your own garlic crop, especially if like mine your soil is free-draining. Plant individual cloves of garlic. 'Solent Wight' is a great variety for our greyer British climate and forms large plump bulbs. If you have a sheltered warmer spot try 'Lautrec Wight,' which as its name suggests originates from the town of Lautrec in France. It produces particularly handsome pink/purple cloves and is widely regarded in France as the best garlic. Snip off any wispy ends or the birds will pull cloves from the soil (I learned that one from experience!). The bulbs will be ready to harvest when the leaves start to die off and turn yellow, which is usually around June or July.

Tidy established perennials by cutting back those that have become pulpy. Simply cut back the decaying material, chop it up and add it to the compost heap.



If you have an unheated greenhouse, a summer house or conservatory you can sow some sweet peas and leave them to germinate. Sow the seeds in deep pots or root-trainers filled with multi-purpose compost then keep the pots in a propagator or cover them with a transparent plastic bag. Once seeds have germinated, remove the covering.

If the soil isn't frozen, you can plant bare-root fruit bushes such as gooseberries, raspberries, and blackberries. Make sure you dig a hole that can take the plant's roots comfortably without squashing them. Then label them clearly because it's easy to forget which varieties you're growing!

Finally, if you're looking for the perfect gift for the gardener in your life please can I recommend Gold Leaf Winter Touch gloves. They have a Thinsulate™ thermal lining which keeps hands toasty warm even in the coldest weather, AND an additional Ski-Dri™ waterproof, breathable lining so your hands remain dry even when used in the wet! I also love the reinforced palm because it's great for spade work. As you can tell, I love mine, and I am neither sponsored by nor connected with the company in any way; mine were a recent gift and I've been raving about them to anyone who will listen ever since!



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Win 2 tickets

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Who's the special guest?

Email your answer to: thecoretheatre@solihull.gov.uk - and please put '**Great Balls of Fire**' as the subject line.

Closing date for entries is **10th January 2022**. The winner will be drawn at random and notified by email after this date.

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Mindbenders
Can you find the three hidden phrases?

answers on page 33

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- Wednesday 29th Dec - 9:00am-6:00pm
- Thursday 30th Dec - 9:00am-6:00pm
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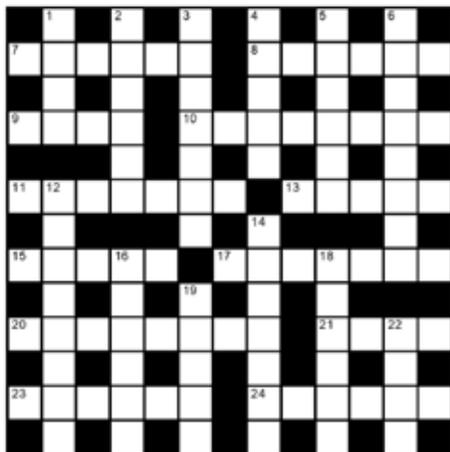
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crossword

clues



Across

- 7 Destitute, lacking (6)
- 8 Allowing movement in a single direction (3-3)
- 9 False god (4)
- 10 Towards the back, at the end (8)
- 11 Major road (7)
- 13 Local authority regulation (5)
- 15 Cow's mammary gland (5)
- 17 Having taste, geetel (7)
- 20 Computer ID (8)
- 21 Adorable, charming (4)
- 23 Tearful (6)
- 24 Reach, realise (6)

Down

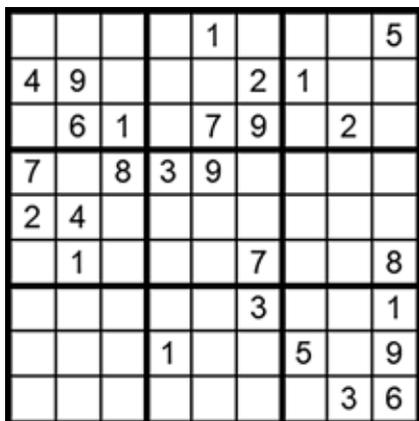
- 1 Desire, covet (4)
- 2 Riches (6)
- 3 Abiding, immortal (7)
- 4 Articulate (5)
- 5 Room to move and grow (6)
- 6 Bearing, stance (8)
- 12 Commerce, trade (8)
- 14 A few, not many (7)
- 16 Insect with pincers (6)
- 18 Encourage, foment (6)
- 19 Assess, quantify (5)
- 22 Offshoot (4)

answer on page 45

how to play sudoku

It's simple!

Fill in the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box, contains the numbers 1 through to 9 with no repetition. You don't need to be a genius. These puzzles use logic alone. Watch out! Sudoku is highly addictive.



answer on page 45

Last-minute Christmas Gift Cake

Traditionally Christmas cakes are made well in advance but if you haven't had time try our last-minute version. Because it makes two you can also give one away as a gift, and solve two problems with one recipe!



Makes 2 cakes, each serving 8
Preparation time: 30 minutes
Cooking time: 1-1¼ hours depending on oven.

Ingredients

600g good-quality mixed dried fruits
 150ml whisky, warmed
 150g stem ginger, drained, plus
 8 tbsp ginger syrup from the jar
 200g butter, softened, plus extra for greasing
 300g plain flour
 2 tsp baking powder
 2 tsp mixed spice
 200g soft light brown sugar
 4 large free-range eggs
 2 tbsp milk
 Finely grated zest of 2 small oranges and 2 lemons
 50g ground almonds

150g whole glacé cherries

Method

Put the dried fruits in a bowl and pour over the whisky. Set aside for 30 minutes to allow the fruit to plump up.

Briefly blend the ginger and its syrup in a mini food processor until finely chopped. Preheat the oven to 160°C/fan140°C/gas 3.

Grease and line a 20cm square cake tin. Sift the flour, baking powder and mixed spice into a large

bowl and add the rest of the ingredients except the cherries. Beat with a hand-held electric whisk for 2 minutes until pale and fluffy. Fold in the soaked dried fruits and any whisky, the blitzed ginger and the cherries.

Spoon into the baking tin and level off. Bake for 1-1¼ hours (this depends very much on your oven. My fan oven is super-quick whereas my mother's aga is slower). If you're unsure I recommend you check after an hour then every fifteen minutes after that, until the cake is firm and golden brown. To check, insert a skewer into the centre of the cake.

If it comes out clean the cake is cooked. You can cover it loosely with foil after 1 hour if the centre needs more time. This prevents the surface darkening too much. Leave in the tin for 10 minutes, and then remove to a wire rack to cool.

Remove a thin slice from all sides of the cake and discard. Cut the cake in half to make 2 rectangles.

Top with marzipan and white fondant icing and decorate with a sprig of holly.

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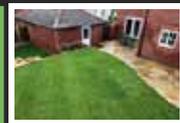
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Freezer Meat Mastery

How to freeze meat

Like many people I clear out my freezer in the run up to Christmas to make room for all the festive goodies. And like many people (please tell me it's not just me) I often end up looking at freezer bags or boxes dated several months previously wondering, 'Is this still safe to use?'

It's convenient to fill up our freezers with frozen meals and ingredients, since freezing food is the best way to guarantee freshness, but how long can we freeze meat before it goes off?

Well, the good news is that if your freezer is set to -18C (which is the recommended safe freezer temperature) then frozen meat is actually safe to eat pretty much indefinitely, because this temperature prevents the growth of microorganisms and inactivates any microbes (such as bacteria, yeasts, and moulds). But safe to eat definitely does not equate to 'good to eat'. Meat that's been in the freezer for a long time will begin to degrade and suffer from freezer burn.

It's safe to freeze meats in its original packaging; but if you plan to keep it in your freezer for longer than two months it's good to overwrap the packaging with airtight heavy-duty packaging such as foil, cling film, freezer paper, or a freezer bag.

Poultry - Whole chickens and turkeys can last in the freezer for 12 months and still taste good. Chicken pieces should be consumed within 9 months, and giblets for just three months.

Beef, Veal, & Lamb - Steaks should be consumed within 8 months. Chops, which are on the bone deteriorate faster and should be eaten within 6 months.

Pork - Uncooked pork is similar to beef. Chops will last four to six months in the freezer. Sausages will last about four months and



bacon will be fine for about six months.

Fish & Seafood - Fish and seafood has a much shorter freezer life. Generally, two to three months is recommended for fish, three months for raw prawns and four months for cooked prawns (which have been bought frozen).

Mince - I was quite surprised by the fact that the quality of mince deteriorates pretty rapidly in the freezer and shouldn't really be kept beyond four months.

Cooked & Leftover Meat - Cooked meat doesn't maintain its quality in the freezer for as long as raw meat does. Poultry and fish dishes will keep for 4-6 months. Beef, veal, lamb, and pork dishes should only be kept for 2-3 months.

Things you might not know you can freeze safely

Eggs! - Break the eggs into silicone muffin cups and they will stay fresh for up to four months, though you can keep them for 12 months.

Nuts - If you love nuts it's cheaper to buy them in bigger bags. But because of their high fat content they can go rancid. So, freeze them in small portions and they will last for 6 months.

Happy Freezing this festive season.



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Clutter-free for Christmas

<https://helpforhoarders.co.uk/>

Look around your house. Would you be able to invite people in without a second thought? Or would unexpected festive visitors send you into a panic? It's easy to feel overwhelmed by clutter but follow these simple 'no extra mess steps and you'll soon be ready to open the front door with a smile. Grab a bin bag. Go quickly through the house from room to room and put in anything that is obviously just rubbish: empty packets, wrappers, junk mail etc. Once you've done it, go through again and see whether you've missed anything. The chances are that going through the first time has opened your eyes to other things which can just be thrown away. Now do any washing-up or load the dishwasher. Clearing the kitchen surfaces makes a huge difference.

Grab another bag. Go through the house again and this time look for items of clothing that need to be washed. Pop them in the bag

and take them to the washing baskets. Take couple of empty and go through yet again, this time looking for items that are easy charity shop donations - things you won't need or use again so don't want to waste time finding a home for, but which are too good to throw away. These might be old toys and games, CDs, DVDs, books, extra pots and pans etc. By now things will be looking much tidier. At this point grab another box and go through one last time and look for things that are obviously out of place but which you know have a home. Put them in the box and rehome them as you go round the house. Then do the washing and drying, and fold and put away the items

Hopefully by now you should feel more in control of your surroundings and will be able to see a way forward. Obviously if your clutter is such a big problem that you are still overwhelmed speak to your doctor about seeking professional help.



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A family concern



a good read

reviews By Willow Coby

Christmas is a wonderful time to curl up with a book. The shelves are full of this year's new and shiny celebrity offerings. But Christmas is surely a time for nostalgia. So, pour yourself a glass of eggnog or mulled wine and let's visit Christmas Past...

For Grown-Ups

For a real nostalgia-fest and a lyrical description of times gone by, when 'December was as white as Lapland though there were no reindeers'? dig out 'A Child's Christmas in Wales' by Dylan Thomas, preferably with Edward Ardizzone's illustrations. Short, simple, and beautiful, it sums up Christmas with the Uncles, snow on the ground and the myriad delights for a small boy on the best day of the year.

If, however, you are feeling slightly less full of cheer and goodwill, Jilly Cooper might be more to your taste. The Christmas scene in 'Appassionata' is one of my favourite depictions of the holiday, and every December I find myself turning first to 'How to Survive Christmas' – bleak, witty and sometimes crushingly accurate, it is Cooper's account of how to get through a typical festive season.

Another excellent book with a brief but memorable Christmas sequence, is 'Angels and Men' by Catherine Fox. It is hard to get hold of, but I promise you, Mara's Christmas with her grandmother is not one you will forget – and the rest of the book is beautifully written, too.

Finally, from the realms of fantasy, why not try Christmas Discworld style in 'Hogfather' by Terry Pratchett? Was there ever a writer with a sharper wit? As you might expect, his Santa is quite different – for a start, those are pigs, not reindeer pulling his sleigh. And he seems a little on the bony side. What does Death have to do with Christmas? More than you might think....

For Kids

For many people, 'The Snowman' by Raymond Briggs is their Christmas classic of choice. I actually prefer his 'Father Christmas.' Less saccharine and eloquently



told with pictures and few words, it follows a curmudgeonly Santa on his journey around the globe, dropping off presents, struggling down chimneys, trudging upstairs, through all kinds of weather...Merry Bloomin' Christmas!

Another favourite is 'Dear Father Christmas' by Jeanne Willis and Rosie Reeve. This picture book follows Mary as she writes her Christmas letter. Her wishes are different, as she doesn't need any more toys – but an everlasting hamster and self-tying shoelaces would come in rather handy. Of course, there is a twist in the tale, but we don't see it coming, and my kids read it over and over again – even at the height of summer.

If you like the Jolly Postman, then you will love 'The Jolly Christmas Postman' by Janet and Allan Ahlberg. As you might expect, there are a range of letters to open, with cards, games and even a jigsaw puzzle for the lucky nursery rhyme characters on his rounds. An absolute delight.

And finally...

How could we look at Christmas without mentioning the two biggest Christmas classics ever? I mean of course, 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens and 'The Night Before Christmas' by Clement C Moore. I know you have seen a million and one adaptations of the former (The Muppets do it best!), but the book really is worth a read. Be honest, when else are you going to curl up by the fire with a Dickens novel if not during a long snowy holiday? Try it. As for the former, we read it aloud every Christmas Eve, just before the lights go out. I stole this tradition from a friend, and I am passing it on to you.

Merry Christmas!



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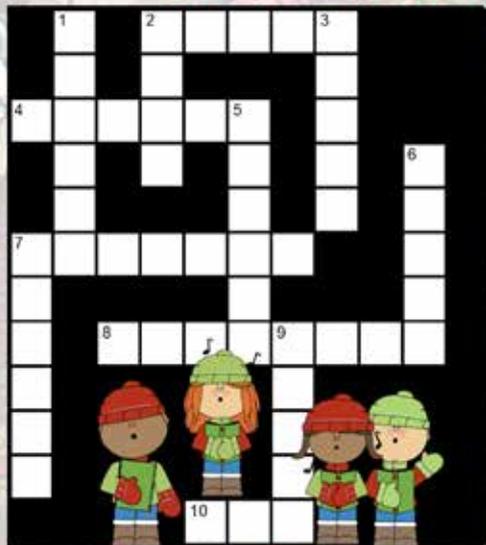
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Kids' Page

CHRISTMAS CAROL CROSSWORD



Across

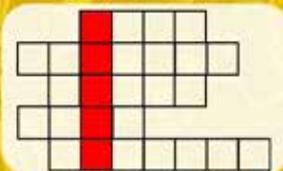
- 2 O Holy _____ (5)
 4 Hark! The Herald _____ Sing. (6)
 7 Little _____ Boy (7)
 8 O Come All Ye _____ (8)
 10 _____ to the World (3)

Down

- 1 Away in a _____ (6)
 2 The First _____ (4)
 3 We _____ Kings (5)
 5 _____ Night (6)
 6 Once in _____ David's City (5)
 7 Little _____ (6)
 9 The _____ and the Ivy (5)

Christmas Word Grid

Solve the Christmas Clues to fill the grid. The shaded row spells the name of a welcome festive visitor.



- The three wise men followed one.
- Pull one to make a BANG!
- The _____ Gabriel.
- You might receive one at Christmas
- We hang them on the tree.

Hidden word - SANTA

BAUBLES
 GIFT
 ANGEL
 CRACKER
 STAR

Christmas Word Grid Solution

Q: In what year does New Year's Day come before Christmas?
 A: EVERY year!

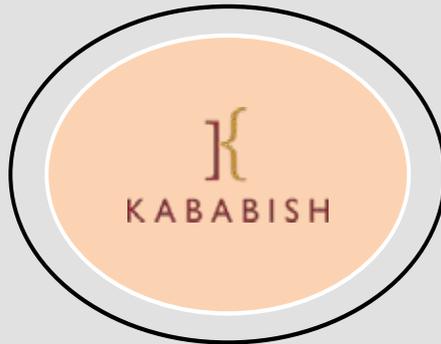


Christmas Carol Crossword



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8	6	1	5	7	9	3	2	4
7	5	8	3	9	6	4	1	2
2	4	6	8	5	1	7	9	3
9	1	3	2	4	7	6	5	8
5	8	9	7	6	3	2	4	1
6	3	2	1	8	4	5	7	9
1	7	4	9	2	5	8	3	6

Sudoku Solution

from page 27

N	W	E	V	L	C						
B	E	R	E	F	T	O	N	E	W	A	Y
E	A	E	C	E	R						
I	D	O	L	R	E	A	R	W	A	R	D
		T	N	L	A	I					
H	I	G	H	W	A	Y	B	Y	L	A	W
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T	W	U	R	I	W						
C	R	Y	I	N	G	A	T	T	A	I	N
Y	G	E	L	E	G						

crossword Solution

from page 27



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